



FrontLineSupervisor

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A newsletter from the Employee Assistance Program

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<http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eap.html>

■ **When I tried to discipline an employee for declining performance, he told me that he had been diagnosed with an "emotional condition." He said he stopped taking his medications a year ago and that he's mostly fine except for some "bad days." Can the EAP help him?**

Yes. Encouraging use of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) gives your employee a supportive, confidential setting to discuss his condition. Because he struggles periodically with his illness, he will benefit by sharing his situation with a compassionate, well-trained professional. It is possible that your employee's condition qualifies as a disability under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). That could mean you'd need to provide "reasonable accommodations" to assist him in performing his work, and the EAP may help fill that requirement. Follow your agency procedure to learn what he needs from you, or the work organization, to perform his job satisfactorily. Consider whether those requests are reasonable and can be accommodated. Don't ignore an employee's statement about an "emotional condition." Instead, consult with your human resources representative and the EAP for more information.

■ **My employee does not seem to have an attitude that indicates he buys into a shared vision of our workplace mission. Is this an EAP matter? I don't see a mental health issue here. How do I substantiate a supervisor referral?**

A supervisor referral to the EAP is appropriate whenever an employee exhibits a problem that adversely affects performance or relationships with co-workers. The question to ask is whether it is continuing despite your efforts to change it. The EAP provides a safe outlet for your employee to express his frustrations about his role in the organization and his opinions on what the vision should be. Through the EAP, he may develop a better understanding of how his beliefs and/or behaviors sabotage his effectiveness. He may conclude that he has more to gain by displaying a cooperative, team-oriented attitude—and that might motivate him to change. He can use the EAP to practice voicing his concerns in a more persuasive manner. Another plus of referring him to the EAP is that it signals your faith in him to adjust his attitude for the team's greater good. That's better than simply demanding that he "shape up or else."

■ **My boss called me a stress-monger after some of my employees complained about my hard-charging style. I am not as bad as these employees have made me out to be with my**

If you are as tough as others report, it is your problem because you are contributing to an unhealthy work environment. Employees cannot perform at their best if they report to a supervisor who exerts constant pressure and creates an atmosphere of anxiety. Workplace stress more than doubles the risk of death from heart attack, stroke, and other cardiovascular conditions, according to a recent British study. End-running to your boss may indicate that you are not doing what it takes to understand the impact of your work style on employees. Collaborate with your

■ **boss. If others get stressed because I push them to excel, why is that my problem?**

employees when setting ambitious goals, and reward them for superior results. You can damage your career prospects if you develop a reputation as an unrelenting task master and disappoint your bosses who see complaints, high turnover, and surging absenteeism as signs of poor leadership.

■ **I am a newly promoted manager. Instead of being part of the staff, I now supervise them. There is a lot of gossip and snickering behind my back among my employees. I want to end some of the friendships that existed before, but how do I do it?**

Now that you're a boss, you're going to face some sniping from discontented or resentful employees. Most experienced managers come to realize that they cannot remain friends with their former peers. Instead, they strive to earn employees' respect. Rather than terminate friendships abruptly, it's better to hold private, heart-to-heart talks with each of these individuals. Explain that you will measure your success in your new role by the extent to which everyone performs at their best and achieves team goals. Express your admiration for their strengths and ask how you can help them attain their personal and professional objectives. By presenting yourself as a listener who's eager to facilitate their success, you can earn their trust even as the nature of the friendship changes.

■ **My employee, who has a commercial driver's license, reportedly told another coworker he knows how to beat a drug test. All drivers participate in the drug screening program, and we have never had a positive test. What should I do, and how worried should I be?**

Extensive research is conducted by the drug testing industry to identify ways employees attempt to beat drug tests. Dozens of products promise to beat a positive test, but most rely upon drinking enough water that the urine sample becomes diluted. Despite these products, the frequency at which employees seek to beat drug tests is dropping. This has coincided with a national drop in the number of drug positives because of vigilant employers remaining aggressive about drug abuse in the workplace. Follow your policy, talk to those who administer your program, and pay attention to performance. Drug users are still 10 times more likely to miss work, 3.6 times more likely to be involved in on-the-job accidents, 5 times more likely to file workers' comp claims, and 33 percent less productive. These things you can document.

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